

for wildlife, especially breeding songbirds. A major conservation target should be these bottomlands and adjacent slopes, which extend far into Johnston County and eventually connect with similar habitats at Middle Creek, near Smithfield.

Another significant wildlife habitat is the Marks Creek corridor, which starts east of Knightdale and extends south along the creek to a 7,500-acre block of undeveloped land straddling the Wake-Johnston county line at the confluence of Marks Creek and the Neuse River. The 7,500-acre area is bisected by only two country roads, and though it is at present a patchy mix of hardwood forest, planted pine stands (some recently cut), and farmland, it is significant because of the sheer size of the roadless, undeveloped area. If protected from development, the area's value for wildlife habitat would increase significantly in the long-term. Because of the unusually high number of large tracts in the Marks Creek watershed and its roadless area, practically speaking it represents a significant conservation opportunity for Wake County, Wendell, Knightdale, TLC, and state agencies.

There are a few areas of controversy regarding protection of wildlife habitat. First, the animals in strongest decline in the county (perhaps excluding aquatic ones) are those inhabiting pastures and fields; the loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), eastern meadowlark (*Sternella magna*), and grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) are rapidly losing habitat in the county and elsewhere to development. There has been some conservation initiatives to protect farmland, for scenic value, for wildlife, and other reasons, by TLC and a few other entities. Though conservationists do not wish to see farmlands and other fields become developed, how much effort and funding should be spent on this protection (as opposed to more forested or otherwise high-quality lands)? Second, scrub/shrub species are also declining over much of North Carolina and the eastern United States. Certainly, clearcuts and other timber harvest provide suitable habitat, and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is trying to provide such early-succession habitat for species such as the northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) and eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) by cutting some pine stands at Falls Lake and other places it manages. However, this timber harvest is a loss of habitat for mature pine species and other wildlife inhabiting hardwood understory. Thus, there is a trade-off of wildlife species with timber harvest to provide early succession habitat.

The important point in wildlife habitat conservation is that large tracts of land currently in private, unprotected ownership need to be protected, through acquisition, easement, or other means. There are a number of new land management/protection options available now to farmers and other landowners to provide habitat for wildlife, in some cases involving tax benefits; the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the N.C. Division of Forest Resources have programs that assist landowners and wildlife. Land for the benefit of wildlife need not be pristine, mature forests. Of course, there are relatively few such places remaining in the uplands in Wake County, but a number of creek corridors (e.g., Marks Creek, Buffalo Creek, Moccasin Creek, and Middle Creek) are still essentially in private ownership and are prime sites to protect, whether identified here as "wildlife habitat" or not. Protection of such creek corridors will also provide at least some protection to important aquatic wildlife, as well.